

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 24, 2007

President Hosni Mubarak  
c/o Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt  
3521 International Court, NW  
Washington DC 20008

Dear President Mubarak,

Earlier this year, Rep. Franks spoke to Ambassador Fahmy, urging him to look into the case of Abdel Kareem Amer Soliman, a blogger that was arrested and held in solitary confinement for months without access to his lawyer. We were saddened to learn that on March 12th of this year, Mr. Soliman lost his appeal and was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of criticizing the President and insulting Islam on a personal web blog. As this was the first time a blogger has actually been sentenced in Egypt, this case sets a very disturbing precedent for others that would speak out in defense of human rights and religious freedom throughout Egypt.

While Kareem – himself a Muslim – was critical of extremism within Islam, the ability to discuss and even criticize one's religious beliefs is an important aspect of freedom of religion and expression. If Egypt is to be a model of democracy in the Middle East, it must first be a country where these rights, which are fundamental in any democracy, are flourishing.

Therefore, we would like to express our serious concern over the sentencing of this young man and ask you to seek his immediate release and pardon. Moreover, we urge you to ensure freedom of expression for all Egyptian bloggers and to ensure that Egypt's vibrant blogging community continues to thrive without persecution.

On his personal web blog, Mr. Soliman raised many concerns that we hope you will also address. These include concerns with rising Islamic extremism at Al Azhar University and attacks on the Coptic Christian community in Al Cush that were not sufficiently addressed by your government. Since his remarks, the Coptic Christian community continues to face serious discrimination and attacks by both society and the government, most recently in Bamha. Open dialogue about the dangers of religious extremism is essential in all academic institutions to prevent these ideologies from flourishing and creating an atmosphere of hatred toward religious minorities and those that dissent from the majority religion.

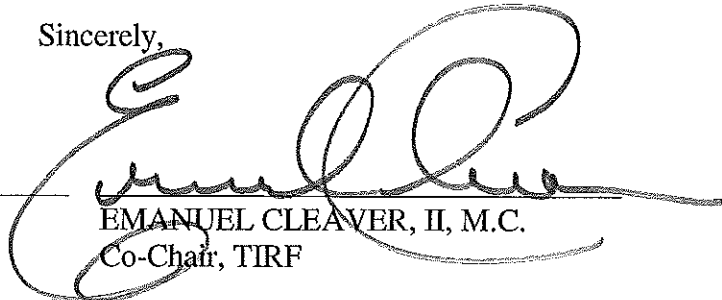
Religious defamation laws, such as Article 98(F) of the Penal Code which was used to convict Mr. Soliman, often have the opposite effect of their intent by stifling the religious freedom of those they deem to protect; this is often the result of subjective interpretations by judicial authorities about the religious tenets of a faith. Moreover, such laws violate international human rights standards which protect an individual's right to freedom of religion or belief rather than religious institutions or specific beliefs.

For example, while Egyptian law purportedly protects the three “heavenly religions” – Islam, Judaism, and Christianity – from being attacked or defamed, Mr. Soliman’s case proves that not even professing Muslims are safe. The purported protection for these communities has already been mentioned above, and we would also note that the Baha’is were recently denied legal standing or protection and there is an ongoing display of materials vilifying those of the Jewish faith in the state controlled and semi-official media that raise contradictions with this law as well.

For a long time Egypt has been hailed as a democratic ally of the United States in the Middle East, and as such has received nearly \$2 billion in foreign aid annually. Yet, it is increasingly difficult for Americans to maintain support for a government that is stifling the voices that would help sustain its own democracy, while allowing Islamic extremists greater influence over the society – whether through the police or education systems.

Therefore, as Co-chairs of the Congressional Task Force on International Religious Freedom, we respectfully request your attention to these concerns and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

  
TRENT FRANKS, M.C.  
Co-Chair, TIRF  
EMANUEL CLEAVER, II, M.C.  
Co-Chair, TIRF